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THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY.

In these days of industrial concentration and wealth-getting, the impression is apt to prevail that the whole industrial machinery is organized for the mere sake of production and the profit incidental thereto. Workers, under such a conception, are regarded as the parts of a machine system instead of members of a society. But even from a viewpoint of this kind, the eight-hour day, in so far as it affects the productive power of the worker, becomes a question of great importance. When it is stated that the future culture of the laborer depends upon this movement, that poverty is to be driven from the industrial world and industrial depressions held in check, everyone, skeptical or otherwise, must pause to listen to the arguments presented for such a cause. It becomes, when attached to the philosophy of trade-unionism, the great question, the most important with which labor has to deal.

The introduction of machinery at the close of the last century, with the attendant high cost of capital, forced longer hours of labor than existed under the old domestic system. Human endurance was for many years the sole check upon a day's labor. The whole tendency of modern industry, even with the shortening of hours, is in the direction of increased exertion. The essential element in the machine organization is the human one, the most precious and the most difficult to replace. The energy of a worker in any industry should always be equal to that of the day before. If the pains of labor are heavy, the tone of the workman is lowered, and his surplus energy disappears, while he tends to become a mere automaton valuable to society for the net surplus he creates for others. The round of production of energy into goods, goods into utilities, and utilities into energy is broken down by any such heavy burden. We must, therefore, hail, certainly from the viewpoint of the community, any movement likely to increase its working power. Whether the eight-hour day is able to do this is the question with which we must deal.

The eight-hour day is not a new question. As early as 1842, and still earlier, in England such a working day was agitated, but so far in advance of the hours then worked was the demand that little attention was paid to the movement. The agitation for the eight-hour day has been materially affected by historical and industrial events. The Civil War postponed the whole question of shorter hours for several years, and the movement was just gathering strength when the panic of 1873 again postponed its consideration. In the next twenty years the railroad strikes of 1877, the industrial depression of 1883, the Haymarket riot of 1886, and the panic of 1893 kept the question in the background; but after the long series of difficulties, during a time of great prosperity, the eight-hour day again made its appearance for serious consideration.

The basis of this extraordinary movement is a philosophical one, strongly stated and widely believed. It may be briefly put as follows: Economic ills come from poverty, poverty in turn is due to overproduction and the presence of the unemployed in large numbers in society. Society can be relieved from this burden by larger wages and shorter hours of labor. Shorter hours in turn mean an increased standard of living, wider consumption, and in consequence a larger demand, causing the creation of goods at a lower price and the continuous employment of labor in order to meet the demand and furnish the supply. In such a philosophy the standard of living is governed by wants, and wants are determined by the social opportunities of the masses. All of this can be accomplished by reducing the hours of labor. Wages under such system, it is argued, will be increased in two ways: by reducing enforced idleness and by creating new wants and raising the standard of living.

The arguments back of the philosophy of the eight-hour day may be grouped under the three heads of economic, social, and human necessities. It is demanded by economic necessity, for the reason that the modern factory can turn out more goods than are needed to supply the wants of people. Machines and inventions are continually introduced, resulting in no higher wages for the worker and the piling up of goods for which there is no

market. The increased purchasing power of his wages may be lost at any time by the competition of the unemployed who tend to force the employed to take a lower remuneration. The worker is thus confronted by lower wages to balance lower prices.

The employer, too, is compelled to keep in the procession of low cost, producing cheaply when he needs the supply, closing his mills when the demand falls and his supply is sufficient. This condition of affairs produces the unemployed.

It is the presence of the unemployed that creates the social necessity for the eight-hour day, so it is urged. A large body of unemployed increases the burdens of society, and enlarges the ranks of criminals and those dependent upon charity. The trade unions are jeopardized by the greater difficulty of keeping up their organization and their rates. Union wages fall, demand for commodities declines, the weaker concerns fail, and consolidation of interests results, bringing another social problem for solution.

The wear and tear upon human life steadily increases under modern methods of production. This is the third reason urged for the adoption of the eight-hour day. If men are to stand as heads of families, as electors, and even as operators of machines, they must have time for rest, for education, and for family life. The responsibility of government increasingly falls upon the working classes in a democracy. Shorter hours of labor alone can give the worker the leisure for careful study of the present-day problems thrust more and more upon the electorate for decision.

The stanch followers of trade-unionism believe that in the philosophy just enunciated they have a solution of the question of the unemployed, and consequent fluctuation of wages; but to this the great socialist element in the trade-union movement replies that the reduction of hours is a necessary feature of a labor program, but that it is unsatisfactory and reactionary as a substitute for the socialist program. Nothing but the latter can overcome the blighting influence of overproduction under the machine régime of private property. To the socialist the introduction of new machinery, higher speeds, and reorganization

will always displace more workers than can be employed by a reduction of hours. In other words, to them the eight-hour day is a palliative, not a solution, of present-day evils. To this the reply is sometimes made: "If eight hours will not bring the desired result, then six, certainly four, hours a day will employ those out of work."

It is at this point that we may turn to a careful examination of the eight-hour-day philosophy and the questions kindred to it. Fundamentally there can be no objections to the desirability of the eight-hour day; but to the philosophy and basis of the argument very serious objection may be taken. Under the eight-hour-day movement is an abiding belief in the power of the standard of living to increase wages, and that demand for commodities constitutes the principal employing force of labor. From this point of view, shorter hours mean increased standard of living and wider consumption, leading to a larger demand for commodities, and as a consequence to extended employment of workers. But "want" and "demand" are not synonymous terms. Want does not develop into demand unless accompanied by purchasing power. Hence we must come back to the source of wages upon which the whole question of the eight-hour day hinges. The wage-earner does not influence the market and produce the results noted in the philosophy of the short-hour movement, except as he is the possessor of material things. Undoubtedly the rate of wages does depend upon the demand for labor, but in turn the demand for labor rests upon the aggregate capital of the community, which is determined by the gross production and the demand for commodities, while the gross production is governed by the productivity of labor. Wages are thus ultimately paid out of product.

In this statement of the source of wages it will be noted that the demand for commodities determines the amount of capital that will be used for productive purposes, but in no sense does an increase of wages rest solely upon the cost of subsistence. Increase of wages, as well as reduction of hours, is limited by the producing power of labor. Whether the laborer gets all he is entitled to does not materially affect the arguments advanced

for the eight-hour day. Employers will pay for production, and no more. It is a most dangerous fallacy that looks upon work as definite in amount, that must be done regardless of wages or number to be employed. Employment must rest ultimately upon the amount of wealth created. Consequently, the eight-hour-day question resolves itself into this query: Can as much work be done in eight hours as in ten? It is evidently presumed in the philosophy of the movement that this is impossible, since a great army of the unemployed are to re-enter the ranks of industry when such a day is secured.

As a means of solving the unemployed problem the eight-hour day has no value except as it abolishes overtime and all its kindred evils. The phenomenon of non-employment is due in a large measure to sickness, shiftlessness of individual laborers, and the fluctuations of commercial credit resulting in the closing of mills and the discharge of workers. Upon the first two the eight-hour day has no visible effect; upon the third, by abolishment of overtime, it may have a most important bearing. Employment and production would be rendered more stable, and periods of non-employment and overtime would be displaced by continuous employment of the worker. Objection to overtime as a usual thing is more on the ground of the destruction of seasonal trades and the failure to supply press orders. In some instances the abandonment of overtime would not materially affect the season of employment, but there is no reason why press orders may not be anticipated by buyer and seller, causing a more equitable distribution of work throughout the year. On the other hand, it is urged that to cut the hours of the day will give greater opportunity for overtime, but this may be adequately answered by the vote of trade unions upon this point; although individually the members may favor such practice, in the long run it means a lowered rate and a contracted area of employment.

The vast majority of the advocates of this movement favor it because they hope the blighting competition of the unemployed may be removed by the reduction of hours of labor. Such experience as has been had in various lands where the eight-hour

day has been in vogue hardly bears out the hope for such a result. In Victoria the unemployed are still evident in great numbers. The organization of the "New Unionism" in this Australian state is proof of the inability of the eight-hour day to absorb those out of work. It may be boldly stated that no provision such as the one under discussion is able to solve the difficulties which have their root in the whole economic basis of industry. Nevertheless, the eight-hour day has its reward and is worth seeking.

Not, then, as a means of employing the "reserve army of industry," as the unemployed are sometimes called, is the eight-hour day to be advocated, but rather as a means of giving to men a wider interest in life, the possibility of greater culture, and the surety of education commensurate with the problems now forced upon our democracy for solution. It is not, then, as a private measure that this movement is acceptable, but as a public necessity. More important still is the query: Can such a day be attained? Remembering that wages depend upon the productivity of labor, it remains to be seen how far an eight-hour day is likely to impair production and in consequence injure the wealth-producing power of the country. Experience, however, furnishes an answer, for in many manufacturing plants it has been shown that in the long run the men are able to produce as much in eight as in ten hours, while the proprietors add such eloquent testimonials as "less drunkenness," "greater regularity of attendance," and "better class of men at work." If the eight-hour day is productive of higher intelligence, it must bring better results. In the English coal mines the eight-hour day has been the rule for some years, with no special diminution in the output. This mysterious result, defiant of the "rule of three," is due to the power of greater intensity of work during a shorter time—evidence of the fact that the energy of the worker has not decreased from day to day from the long hours of labor.

In the various occupations where no products are created, but exchange alone carried on, there is no reason why trade might not be confined to shorter hours than at present. The

fear of loss of custom and the reluctant advantage to a neighboring merchant keep men from cutting down the hours of clerks. In reality there is no reason why buyers could not easily conform their purchases to the hours set by the eight-hour day. But in the railway and street-car service the public demands trains and cars at all times. The eight-hour day in such instances would mean increased expense of operation; but the public would get a better service by the use of two shifts of men in the case of street railways than at the present time. More than that, the general adoption of eight hours would confine travel to more limited time, reducing comparatively the expense over the present lack of concentrated travel. The present system keeps men at work for long hours, endangering the traveling public by possible carelessness due to sleepiness and fatigue. On the railroad systems even worse conditions prevail, but with much better excuse. The state has from time to time attempted to interfere, but without marked success. The eight-hour day is possible in many divisions of railroad work, and when attainable should be insisted upon by the public for its own protection.

The interests of the individual and the community are by no means identical in the establishment of the eight-hour day. The community desires the highest good and greatest energies of its workers through long periods of time. This can be accomplished in most industries without any accompanying loss of productive power by shorter hours of work, as has been proven in the experience of many industries. On the other hand, in specific instances and in the operation of railroads and street cars the shorter day will increase expense of operation considerably, though not by any very large percentage. In some industries where labor is not employed continuously, but periodically, and gathered from any and all sources, the employer finds it to his advantage to push the hours of work to the longest possible limit. Human energies can stand a pace of this kind for a time, and as the employer does not worry about a future supply of workers he expects to win an increased profit by such a policy. These industries have come to be

called parasitic. The eight-hour day would mean the death of the sweating system and of such industries as are dependent upon excessive hours.

The variation with which this movement may be introduced will have much to do with the social effects resulting from it. If universally adopted, there will be one result ; if by industries, another ; and if in one district and not another, still others. It may be presumed that general adoption of the eight-hour day is virtually impossible, whether forced by legislative action or trade-union ukase. Some industries will be slower than others in the adoption of the measure, but it may be taken for granted that the movement of the best laborers will be from the ten- and eleven-hour districts to the section where the eight-hour day is the rule. In the more unskilled trades this may result in causing a still greater dearth of workers in the rural districts, the attractions of the eight-hour day and the city being too much for the laborers in the agricultural districts. This would tend to increase the ranks of the unemployed in the larger cities.

Perhaps the one great bugbear in reference to this movement is found in the fear that exports will decline in amount, affecting the foreign trade of the nation. In contrast with this position is the repeated statement that the long hours of foreign workers assist materially in checking their competition with us. That, however, was in the days when ten hours' work was the rule. It must be kept in mind that other nations have materially reduced their hours of labor and are fast approaching our standard of factory sanitation and direction. In the words of another : " High wages, short hours, and the resulting mental and physical development facilitate the introduction of more effective methods, and thus reduce the cost of production." There must be a limit to which the principle of short hours can be pushed, but undoubtedly the eight-hour day is within the limit, as is evidenced in the successful mercantile position of England, where the eight-hour day has been in vogue for a number of years.

Nevertheless, the eight-hour day must cost somebody something in loss of profit, greater exertion in a short period of time, or smaller wages. If, however, wages are maintained and the

productivity is kept up, it must be by the increased speed of machinery, the use of poorer material, and finally by the substitution of machines for laborers. The greater uniformity of production of new inventions and new methods ought to prevent any loss to profits. But if such a diminution does actually occur, the loss will fall upon interest, since the wages of superintendence and insurance against risk cannot be affected. If there is a lower rate upon interest due to the eight-hour day, is capital likely to migrate and savings fall in amount? To this it may be replied that the increasing amount of capital in other lands seeking investment indicates the impossibility of any larger amounts leaving the country. The great danger to this movement is in the trade unions themselves, for by limiting output, restricting apprentices, and cutting down the average rate of work the general product of the community is lessened and the wages reduced in consequence. Trade unions in specific instances have been able to do these things and still maintain wages and have the eight-hour day. To reason, however, from the individual to general cases is full of fallacies. In such successful attempts of trade unions the burden has been borne by the remaining industries, but a general reduction of hours with such tactics followed by all trade organization can result in but one thing: a smaller output and in the end less wages.

What, then, are the social effects of the eight-hour day? It is first of all difficult to predict what would be the actual effects upon the product of labor, but the evidence is sufficient to maintain the belief that there would be no material reduction in output. Undoubtedly individual firms might suffer in the transition, but the newer methods and better-adapted laborers would more than make up for this difficulty. In the retail and clerical occupations nothing but good would result from such a day, while some added cost of operation would be incurred in the case of street-railway and transportation companies. Even this burden would be lightened by increased travel within shorter hours. In some instances the industry would be destroyed, it no longer being worth while to produce goods in the old way. In a few industries wages would drop, but in most of them no material

change would occur. In some respects the foreign trade of the country would be changed, but not in the aggregate, while the permanent results are likely to be a lowered rate of interest, a more intelligent body of workers, and a higher taste in buying, resulting in many changes in demand.

One more question remains to be considered, and that is the best way to secure the shorter day. Three methods are open to the advocates of shorter hours: legislative statute, trade-union action, and voluntary act of employers. Any bill providing for shorter hours must be strictly mandatory and make no exceptions. The conditions of overtime must be defined and the law rigidly enforced. Its constitutionality virtually limits such action to public works and to contract factories. Shorter hours by legislation serves as an example on the part of the state or federal authorities, but where attained outside of government circles by legislation the trade unions are often not strong enough to maintain the hours at the old wages. The shorter days can be an abiding possession (where not granted by the voluntary action of employers) only when maintained by public opinion and strong trade-union organization. It would be far better, however, if the shorter day could be secured gradually, through the voluntary acts of employers. The eight-hour day attained in this way is a reasonable request that, from the point of view of selfish interest, employers would do well to grant. Give labor a generation more in the organization of the workers, and great changes will be wrought that will produce marked results in the ownership, direction, and management of industry. Reasonable requests granted now will make the transition less difficult and severe.

The eight-hour day will promote contentment and cheerfulness among the working people of the world. The economic value of this change is yet to be appreciated, but there can be no doubt of its great productive power when applied to industry. Under its influence the old rate of daily production will be maintained, with little or no effect in the long run upon wages, profits, the unemployed, and foreign commerce.

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